

## 2.1. Social Construction of Gender

Women gained the right to vote in 1919, yet almost 100 years, women hold few political leadership positions. This is also mirrored in business, where only 4.6 % of CEOs are women. It has been projected that until 2085, women will not have parity with men in key leadership roles in the U.S. (Pew). This paper and visualization will explore how we define leadership and gender as a society and how that in turn affects this gender discrepancy.

### 2.1.1. Definitions of Gender and leadership

In order to understand the gravity of the gender gap and be able to explore solutions, we need to establish a definition of gender. In American Society, gender is created by one's expectations of and interactions with others as well as one's actions within their structures (Lorber). We assume that gender comes from solely from biology; however this is not the case. We look for gender signs to indicate which gender a person is through certain cues. These cues are not only biological, but are taken from factors such as behavior and clothing. In the beginning of our lives gender is taken from biology when born, and then reinforced throughout development. We are assigned a gender from birth, and then dressed and interacted with depending on that gender selection. Since birth people are sectioned into the categories of boys and girls, and all interactions are altered by those categories. Consequently gender is socially constructed. We are viewing gender as this perceived notion of how someone should behave based on which of these two categories, in which one is placed.

Life experiences shape our personalities, feelings, motivations and ambitions (Lorber). Since interactions are altered by one's perceived gender, all four are shaped by society and interactions to match a certain gender. Thus, this perceived gender often shapes personality, feelings, motivations and ambitions and guides them to fit certain genders. Men are thought to be strong. In contrast women are thought to be weak, because a patriarchic society puts men in control and attributed the more powerful traits. Femininity is also associated with being agreeable, likable, and quiet. Power and control are often seen as strong leadership qualities. This connection between this masculine trait and how society sees leadership is one root cause reason for the gender gap.

Leadership is the power or ability to lead other people. Leadership is thought of as a voice and a direction for a group. Leadership is a way of organizing, communicating, and achieving an objective by leading others. Leadership holds more meaning to us than just the ability to lead others. A strong leader is thought of to hold certain qualities in order to successfully lead others to accomplish a goal. Certain characteristics often come to mind, when leadership is discussed. Ultimately, the goal of leadership is to have a collective group reach a goal. A leader is meant to inspire. We most notably see leaders as a figurehead that will spear head an action. Leaders are often seen as strong, vocal, and confident. This person is in the front and whose words inspire others to reach a goal. These characteristics mirror the social construction of masculinity in the United States.

Strength is one of the main characteristics associated with men, and is also mirrored in leadership characteristics. Political leaders are often the example one draws to, when thinking of a leader. Political leaders are meant to be strong and guide a group of people they represent, thus reinforcing the idea of power and strength defines leadership.

Even though this strong, powerful version of leadership is often how leadership is defined, there are many characteristics associated with leadership and how to accomplish a goal through leading. The Leadership compass is a leadership exercise that references four types of leaders; warrior, teacher, healer, and visionary. The warrior associated with power, is that strong leader discussed earlier. This leader is the motivator. However, this type of leader is not always the most effective in completing a task. This type of leader tends to push forward and can miss certain details. This type of leader tends to be the loudest and most promenade, thus continuing the idea that this is the ideal leader; however, there are other types of leaders. The leadership compass also shows the teacher, healer and visionary as these other types. Healer is associated with love and the ability to make everyone feel involved, is concerned with emotions and ethics. The teacher is associated with small details, is wise and keeps everyone organized. The visionary is the big picture leader who is innovated and drives the vision. Ideality leaders possess some of multiple qualities, but not all these leadership types. Often multiple leaders are needed on a team to fulfill these roles. The Healer is often associated with emotions and thus relates to the social construction of women. While this leadership type fits with the social construction of women, it is not as quickly associated with leadership as the warrior. Emotion is often noted as a negative in leadership.

Although personality, feelings, motivations and ambitions are shaped and affected by perceived gender roles, it is important to note that there are other factors, both environmental and biological that effect these traits, characteristics and behaviors, hence gender does not determine one's aptitude in being an effective leader. In addition, leadership is not just achievable through one personality type. Leadership can be effective through different means. Although leadership is generally perceived as needing certain characteristics, different characteristics can have an impact, and sometimes is a better fit for the situation. Gender does not define good and effective leaders; however our perpetuation of one's gender leads to certain expectations and assumptions, which does influences one's opportunities to become a leader.

### 2.1.2. Root causes of Gender Gap in leadership

As previously discussed, the social construction of gender and leadership has an impact on how leadership is associated and perceived. This perception comes into place in determining the root causes of the leadership gap. Many of the reasons girls expressed of why they do not want to be leaders, follows this social construction of gender. Confidence in their skills and competencies had the largest impact on a girls' desire to become a leader.

Girls who noted that they were not interested in leadership noted the following the following reasons as why they would not want to pursue becoming a leader: lack of confidence; stress; fear of public speaking; fear of embarrassment; fear of seeming bossy; and negative peer pressure.

Confidence is often associated with strength, which is seen as a masculine trait. One third of girls, who do not want to pursue leadership, attributed that to not wanting to be laughed at, make anyone mad, come across as bossy, or not being liked by people. Girls and women often try to fulfill the female idea of being likable and agreeable. This is reflected in these reasons not to be a leader. Leadership is seen as a risk to come off as unlikable. Thus many girls are pushed away from leadership.

Girls and boys do not think there is an inherent difference in abilities. Many do see the difficulty for women to become a leader, when compared to a man. Those aware of this discrepancy tended to be female. Within leadership experiences, girls experience more satisfaction from learning and boys obtain greater satisfaction from being in charge.

### 2.1.3. Lacking Data and Social Construction of Gender discrepancies

I will focus mainly on men and women in this thesis. Transgender and other definitions of gender are often not included in these discussions, and thus difficult to give a clear look about how leadership affects transgender and other forms of gender. I use the word gender, because personality traits associated with feminine and masculine relate to leadership traits, not to the sex, which is purely biological. While gender is not a binary topic, I will be focusing on those two, regardless of the sex of the person. Transgender adds other layers and other biases that further lead to discrimination and discrepancies, that cannot be extracted solely by looking at this binary definition of gender. I will refer to those holding masculine traits as men and those holding feminine traits as women, regardless of their sex; however transgender does hold another layer of discrimination missing and studies used, most likely do not represent the transgender community.

## 2.2. Perception of Women in leadership

Perception of gender has led to the social construction of gender. This construction has contributed to personality traits, ambitions, motivations and other behaviors. These factors contribute to the type of leader one is and if one would even like to be a leader in the first place. Thus it is critical to look at how that perception relates to the current numbers of women leaders. This paper and visualization will explore if a connection exists between how one perceives women leaders and how many women are represented in top positions.

### 2.2.1. Younger Perception

It is important to look at both the younger and the older perspective, both for the similarities and the differences. The younger perception provides a look at how girls are perceived and how they perceive themselves, other girls and women as leaders. As gender is socially constructed, the traits associated with gender are learned and reinforced.

Personalities, feelings, motivations and ambitions could have some biological basis, but are highly shaped and by gender perception. Thus it is important to look at ages separately to see if more exposure to gender perception has an impact on leadership. The younger perception has an educational experience and does not experience political or business experiences first hand.

Girls and boys felt they were leaders at a higher rate at a younger and older age. Middle school aged children were less likely to feel as though they were leaders. A possible explanation is that at a younger age, they are less exposed to gender construction and do not feel the pressures of feminism that stop many girls from aspiring to become leaders. Thus a younger perception is important to pursue.

### 2.2.2 Perception by women and men

Those apart of the workforce or political system see firsthand the discrepancies in leadership. While often the privileged group has difficulty seeing discrepancies, show in the younger perception, where girls had a stronger sense of the gender gap, the same is true with those apart of the workforce. However, the numbers of women leaders clearly indicates the existence of a gender gap.